Dead Poet’s Society: Classic Writers Research

**Lord Alfred Tennyson**

* August 6, 1809 (Somerby, Lincolnshire, England) – October 6, 1892
* Fourth of twelve children. His father, Reverend George Tennyson, tutored his sons in classical and modern language. However, he suffered from frequent mental breakdowns heightened by his alcoholism. Tennyson’s brothers didn’t turn out great either. One became an Opium addict and another confined to an insane asylum.
* In 1827, he ran from home to attend Trinity College in Cambridge. He was very shy, not a good quality for a poet. His best friend was Arthur Hallam, who died in 1833. He named his son Hallam after this friend; his other son was named Lionel. Following the death of Hallam, he began to write *In* Memorian which took him seventeen years. He was engaged to Emily Sellwood, but her family called it off when he lost his inheritance. After this, however, he became one of Britain’s most popular poets. Afterwards Emily came back, married him, and gave birth to their two sons. He read his poetry in a large, booming voice. He was made a baron in 1884.
* *Charge of the Light Brigade*, *In memoriam*,and *Mariana.*

**Henry Thoreau**

* 1817 (Concord, Massachusetts) - 1862
* He lived in the countryside, where his family was in relative poverty selling pencils.
* Despite his poor state, he attended and graduated Harvard. He spent two years near a pond “Living deep and sucking out all the marrow of life” (this was in the movie). He was against materialism and conformity, living a simple life. His essays and poems have influenced many, including Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.
* *Inspector of Snowstorms and Rainstorms*, *Walden*, and *Civil Disobedience.*

**John Keats**

* October 31, 1795 (London) – February 23, 1821
* Oldest of four children. His father was a stable-keeper; he died when Keats was eight. His mom died six years later. His grandmother hired two merchants to become the family’s guardians, only one of which took the bulk of the responsibility.
* He became a licensed apothecary in 1816, but never practiced this profession. He wrote most of his poetry between 1818 and 1819. He contracted Tuberculosis from his brother, for whom he had been caring for.
* *Hyperion* (Unfinished), *Ode on Melancholy*, and *ode to a nightingale*.

**Walt Whitman**

* May 31, 1819 (Westhills, Long Island)– March 26, 1892
* Second of nine children. His father, Walter Whitman, was a house builder. His mother was Louisa Van Velsor.
* His love of reading and writing started when he was just twelve years old. He was largely self-taught, learning from what he read. He worked as a teacher from 1836 to 1841, when he became a full time journalist. He founded two newspapers, the weekly, *Long-Islander* and a “free soil” newspaper *Brooklyn Freeman.* He developed a unique style of poetry. He is considered the father of free verse.
* *Leaves of Grass.* Seems to be his most popular poem, which seems to have contained a lot of sexual/offensive content. Other works are *Good-Bye, My Fancy,* and *Drum Taps*.

**Lord Byron**

* January 22, 1788 (Aberdeen, Scotland) – April 19, 1824
* His father abandoned him, he blamed his mother for having been born with a deformed foot. He isolated himself during his youth, of course, not being happy. He is bisexual. When he was ten he inherited his families English title, becoming Baron Byron of Rochdale.
* He was very remote and secretive. *Very.* He had debt, a lot of it, and chose to travel the world with his friend. He ended up in Greece, there, he enjoyed his newfound sexual freedom as well as inspiration for his writings after England had shamed him so. In 1811 he returned to England and wrote a poem of a man looking for his meaning in life and a year later, he became famous over the course of three days. He used his popularity to advocate good things, like social reform and workers’ rights. He had a lot of affairs, divorces and was accused of incest and other things. This eventually led him to become scared of his life because of his status (he was just like a celebrity today would be) he fled England and settled in Italy.
* *Don Juan*, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, and *She Walks in Beauty.*

**The Charge of the Light Brigade**

**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

1.

Half a league, half a league,  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Half a league onward,  
All in the valley of Death  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Rode the six hundred.  
"Forward, the Light Brigade!  
"Charge for the guns!" he said:  
Into the valley of Death  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Rode the six hundred.

2.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"  
Was there a man dismay'd?  
Not tho' the soldier knew  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Someone had blunder'd:  
Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Rode the six hundred.

3.

Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon in front of them  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Volley'd and thunder'd;  
Storm'd at with shot and shell,  
Boldly they rode and well,  
Into the jaws of Death,  
Into the mouth of Hell  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Rode the six hundred.

4.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,  
Flash'd as they turn'd in air,  
Sabring the gunners there,  
Charging an army, while  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif All the world wonder'd:  
Plunged in the battery-smoke  
Right thro' the line they broke;  
Cossack and Russian  
Reel'd from the sabre stroke  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Shatter'd and sunder'd.  
Then they rode back, but not  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Not the six hundred.

5.

Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon behind them  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Volley'd and thunder'd;  
Storm'd at with shot and shell,  
While horse and hero fell,  
They that had fought so well  
Came thro' the jaws of Death  
Back from the mouth of Hell,  
All that was left of them,  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Left of six hundred.

6.

When can their glory fade?  
O the wild charge they made!  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif All the world wondered.  
Honor the charge they made,  
Honor the Light Brigade,  
http://poetry.eserver.org/space.gif Noble six hundred.

This poem was written in memory of a suicidal charge by the light Calvary (part of the British forces) over open terrain during the Battle of Balaclava in Ukraine during the Crimean War (1854-56). 247 out of 636 of the men who participated were either killed or wounded.

This poem is about the events of war. Six hundred men entered the war, they charged at the enemy, through the cannons. The enemy turned back, but they didn’t. At the end of the battle, what was left of the six hundred men became honored. It is possible to make a light connection between this poem and the phrase *Carpe Diem*, seize the day. This connection is that war in general is taking a (usually violent) stand against something, seizing the day to make it what you want.